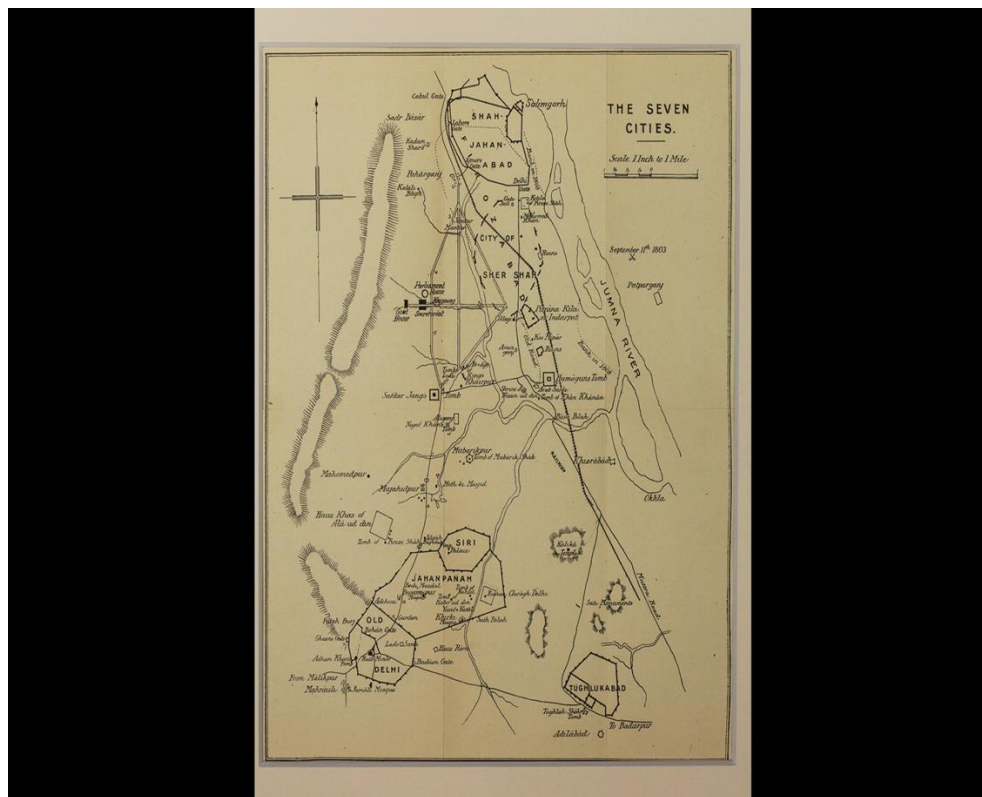


EIGHT CITIES OF DELHI

BUCHAMMA RAO

Delhi is an ancient city. Historians trace the development of "Seven Older Cities of Delhi" belonging to each dynasty that governed Delhi and which were located at Lalkot/Qila Rai Pithora, Siri, Tughlaqabad, Jahanpanah, Firozabad, Shergarh/Purana Qila, and Shahjahanabad.



(Source: <https://sarmaya.in/objects/cartography/the-seven-cities-of-delhi/>)

However, it is said that the Pandavas founded an even earlier city on the banks of the Yamuna and named it Indraprastha, placing the date at around 9th to 8th century BC. The location of Indraprastha is said to lie at the much later Shergarh and between Firoze Shah's Kotla and Humayun's Tomb. Relics of the painted grey ware culture, which lasted from 1100 BC to 350 BC, have been found here but of a more primitive form. However no concrete archeological evidence has been

found for the city of Indraprastha. As Professor B.B. Lal who led the excavations in the area said, “The Indraprastha of the *Mahabharata* was basically created by the pen of a poet” (W. Dalrymple, *City of Jinns*, 1993:331).

Lalkot/ Qila Rai Pithora

The first historical city of Delhi was founded by the Rajput Tomars between AD 1052 and 1060 in Mehrauli on the highest ridge of the Aravalis. The Tomars are known for building the first regular defence fort, later known as the fort Lal Kot (or Red Fort).

The famous warrior king Prithviraj Chauhan (also known as Rai Pithora), has been associated with taking over and extending the Tomars’ fort to cover a much wider kingdom in around 1160 AD. The Chauhans’ city was named Qila Rai Pithora. The ruins of its ramparts are still visible in Saket, the Qutb complex in Mehrauli, Kishangarh and Vasant Kunj.

The Qutb Minar complex was built at the same site by the first Sultan of Delhi, Qutbu'd-Din Aibak, in 1199 AD for the use of the mu'azzin (crier) to give calls for prayer and raised the first storey, to which were added three more storeys by his successor and son-in-law, Shamsu'd-Din Iltutmish (1211-36 AD).

Siri

Siri is the second city of Delhi built during Sultanate rule, and the first to descend to the plains from the Aravali ridge. Alauddin Khilji built Siri city between 1297 to 1307 AD, to protect Delhi from Mongol invaders. He constructed the Siri Fort, which resembled a large Turkish fortress. The palace had marble flooring. Its remains can be seen in large stone walls east of the Hauz Khas reservoir as well as in the ruins within these walls.

Tughlaqabad

Ghiyas-ud-din Tughlaq, the founder of the Tughlaq dynasty, also part of the Delhi Sultanate, retreated back to the high land of the Aravali ridge to build Tughlaqabad, the third city of Delhi, spanning across nearly 6.5 km, over a period of only four years during his short reign (1320–24 AD). Tughlaqabad Fort was shaped like a

hexagon and within it were seven water tanks and it still partially stands on a hillock of the Aravali. It is said that the fort was cursed by the Sufi saint Nizamuddin Auliya who was not allowed to build a stepwell. The saint cursed the city saying, “Ya rahe ujjar ya base gujjar” (it will remain desolate or be occupied by herdsmen). Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq died suddenly when a pavilion collapsed on him.

Jahanpanah

Mohammed bin Tughlaq, son of Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq, did not want to live in the cursed city of Tughlaqabad so he first built Daulatabad in the Deccan and shifted the capital there, but due to lack of water he returned to Delhi to construct the fourth city of Jahanpanah (Refuge of the World) between 1326 and 1327 AD by encircling the earlier cities of Siri and Lal Kot with 13 gates. This city joins the earlier settlements on the ridge to those in the plains. Little remains of this city.

Firozabad

In the second half of the 14th century, the next emperor Firoz Shah Tughlaq, built the 5th city of Delhi on the plains near the Yamuna and named it Firozabad or Firoze Shah Kotla. Enclosed within are ruins of palaces, mosques, pigeon towers, and a water tank. An Ashokan pillar from 3rd century BC can be seen which has inscriptions in the language of Prakrit and some Pali and Sanscrit in the Brahmani script.

Shergarh/Dinpanah

Humayun built the Purana Qila ('Old Fort') around 1538, which is one of the oldest surviving forts in Delhi, within the 6th city of Delhi, Dinpanah (Protector of the World). Sher Shah Suri defeated Humayun and renamed the city Shergarh in 1540. Purana Qila is a large enclosure surrounded by gates. Humayun's gate which has 2 pavilions on top is the most famous. The Qila-e-Kuhna mosque, constructed by Sher Shah Suri in the adjacent Dinpanah, has calligraphy and marble which shows a transition between Lodhi and Mughal styles.

Shahjahanabad

The Mughal Emperor, Shah Jahan (1592-1666) built a city that bears his name Shahjahanabad, the seventh city of Delhi that is now known as the old Delhi. It has impressive landmarks like the Jama Masjid, Fatehpuri Masjid, Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib and Red Fort. Some of its beautiful *havelis* still remain. The city was enclosed within a huge wall with 14 gates but now only 4 gates survive and the walls have been demolished. The city of Old Delhi is a vibrant bustling centre of food, business and shops. The Indian flag is unfurled from the ramparts of the Red Fort on Independence Day 15th August every year.

New Delhi

Under the British the capital was shifted from Calcutta to Delhi in 1911, and a 'New Delhi' was built by British architects Sir Edwin Landseer Lutyens and Sir Herbert Baker. Lutyens' Delhi is the eighth and last city. Lutyens (1869–1944), who was responsible for much of the architectural design and building during the period of the British Raj when India was part of the British Empire, led a group of architects from the 1920s to 1940s in laying out the central administrative area of the city, with the charge of retaining one-third of the area as green space.

The Secretariat Building, which houses various ministries of the Government of India including the Prime Minister's Office, is in front of the Rashtrapati Bhawan (or the old Viceroy's House) and was designed by Herbert Baker.

The eight cities of Delhi reflect the multilayered history of being the capital of several kingdoms and empires - from the British, the Mughals back to the Sultanate and Rajputs to even earlier times.